

## Executive Summary

The *Homeless Families Plan* symbolizes a new era of collaboration between state and local government and the private sector in a crusade against homelessness. Within this past biennium (1999-01) the Office of Community Development (OCD) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) – working in partnership with many advocates and community service providers across the state – have implemented a range of activities and services to help Washington State homeless families with children achieve housing stability.

**Progress Report FY 1999-01.** Starting with a successful round of one-day forums on new resources, OCD and DSHS worked to launch a number of activities including new housing programs, more flexible financial assistance programs, training initiatives, and applications for additional federal funding. Much of the information and analysis of the impact of these new efforts will not be available until programs have been in service for three to five years. However, a number of significant achievements over the past few months can be highlighted and preliminary data discussed.

**DSHS staff training.** DSHS designed an inventive training format on homelessness that encouraged dynamic and active problem solving reaching approximately 3,000 staff. A key component in the training was the involvement of staff from local shelter providers who greatly enhanced the quality and effectiveness of the sessions.

**Welfare to Work Housing Vouchers.** Washington State received 4,165 new Welfare to Work Housing vouchers from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development – more than any other state except California. These vouchers make housing affordable by reducing the rent burden on families.

*“We have developed stronger communication with our community partners in advocating for families who are homeless, which, in turn, makes it easier to serve our mutual clients.”*

*--Comment from DSHS Community Service Office staff*

*The Everett, Island, and San Juan Housing Authorities report excellent working relations with their local welfare offices.*

**Continuum of Care Planning.** DSHS staff in Community Service Offices (CSOs) are playing a crucial role in better coordinating homeless services and integrating delivery systems. CSO staff are important partners in communities who are working to develop an array of housing and services for homeless families. For example, in Region 4, King County, every CSO has identified a liaison as the point person for any issues relating to homelessness. This is but one example of the working partnerships that have been developed between state staff and local shelter providers.

*An effective planning process needs to bring to the table not just the homeless assistance providers, but the mainstream state and local agencies and organizations whose clients are homeless.*

**DSHS' Survey of Homeless Families.** DSHS successfully conducted a survey of homeless families in homeless shelters throughout the state. Using a sampling process, project staff interviewed families using shelter during a single night. Some of the main topics covered by the survey were: numbers and characteristics of families in shelters, current and past access to welfare benefits, need for and use of DSHS-funded social services, and regional differences in data. The first reports will be available early in 2001.

*Substantial empirical survey completed.*

**DSHS Additional Requirements Emergent Needs Program (AREN).** As a part of the first homeless plan, the AREN program was expanded to serve homeless families and to better serve families at-risk of homelessness. Within a few months of the changes, it became evident that the need greatly exceeded available funds. DSHS was able to work closely with the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless (WSCH) and OCD to revise policies to ensure that AREN resources continued to be available to help the families most in need.

*Quick planning preserves resources for families most in need.*

This increased access to AREN has also proven to be a significant benefit to many families caught in domestic violence. The new AREN policies give DSHS case managers the resources needed to help these families move quickly into new housing and out of harm's way.

*Families surviving domestic violence receive timely benefits.*

**Increased Collaboration Between State and Community Agency Staff.** The staff training provided by DSHS produced extra dividends in addition to raising the level of awareness and knowledge of homeless issues and resources. The local WSCH contact persons were instrumental in coordinating the sessions and encouraging other community providers to attend the sessions. This resulted in a rich array of experience that was shared with Children's Administration staff and local DSHS CSO staff that gave social workers a new appreciation for and greater sensitivity to the issues of homelessness many families face on a daily basis.

**Report on Performance Measures of FY 1999-01.** The performance measures in the Homeless Families Plan helps to focus on the ultimate outcome: helping families avoid homelessness or, if they are homeless, helping them to quickly regain and maintain their housing. Reporting on performance measures has been a challenge, especially for OCD due to the limitations in OCD's data collection system. Wherever possible, efforts have been made to track outcome information.

**Increased Emergency Shelter.** From July 1999 to June 2000, the number of bednights provided to families with state Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP) funds increased by 84 percent, from 330,765 to 610,094. A bednight is one person in shelter for one night.

**Increased Housing Capacity.** OCD awarded \$2,073,043 to build or preserve 46 units of transitional housing for homeless families with children and 48 emergency shelter beds for survivors of domestic violence. Two projects are in Spokane. Others are located in Seattle, Tacoma, Yakima, Newport, Vancouver, Lacey, and Chehalis.

*"It's hard when you're stuck to ask for help," said the woman who was in need after having lost her job and finding herself pregnant with twins. "In our case, we didn't have time to be stubborn. We had to have help." Through the Resource Center in Sultan, this family found housing and received help with their first and last month's rent and deposit. The father is working overtime and the couple is looking for other ways to cut their expenses. If the Resource Center hadn't been there to help, the couple felt they would have been homeless when the babies were born.*

*--The Daily Herald  
September 16, 2000*

**DSHS Additional Requirements Emergent Needs Program (AREN).** Between August 1998 and July 2000, the average number of families who received AREN increased by 143 percent, from 1,195 to 2,899. An additional \$14 million was allocated to meet the significant demand for services and certain program restrictions were instituted to ensure that the allocation level would not be exceeded.

**Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) Program.** OCD implemented a major new transitional housing program after close consultation with the WSCH, shelter providers, and other homeless experts. Transitional housing takes a longer term approach to serving homeless families by enabling families to stay in the program for up to two years. A total of 884 homeless families received transitional housing services and 373 exited the program. Of the 373 families, 47 percent transitioned to unsubsidized housing and another 33 percent moved to subsidized housing. Follow-up data on 113 families was gathered six months after participation. Of these 113 families, 51 of them (45 percent) were still housed.

**Data Collection.** OCD published a report on a "Plan for a Data System on People Who Are Homeless" in accordance with a mandate from the Legislature to identify at least two methods of collecting reliable and accurate data on people who are homeless. Based on the finding of the report, OCD submitted a proposal to build a data system that was not funded. Subsequently, OCD built an electronic, web-based reporting system that improves the collection of aggregated shelter-level data on the homeless. This system could serve as the foundation on which a more comprehensive client-level reporting system could be built (one of the recommended improvements from the report). OCD lacks the resources to develop and implement a client-level reporting system statewide. OCD has submitted a budget enhancement request of \$691,263 for the 2001-30 biennium to develop and deploy a client-level homelessness reporting system.

*One sanctioned client from the Olympia CSO had been living in the Black Hills for the last two years. CSO staff assisted her in securing housing, enabling her to look for work and remedy her sanction status.*

*Ferry County Housing Authority assisted a homeless family with rent assistance through the THOR program for eight months. The family is now participating in a Home Purchase and Rehabilitation Program, working on a fixer upper and contributing sweat equity to own their own home.*

**Homeless Families Plan 2001-03: Next Steps.**

At this writing, the work of the previous Homeless Families Plan is still in progress. As we learn more, we will know what needs to be changed or what things could be improved. A good start has clearly been made to address the fundamental barriers facing thousands of homeless families with children in our state today. New partnerships have been forged and we anticipate that coordination will have a measurable impact on how services are delivered. A number of joint and independent actions are anticipated for the upcoming biennium to sustain and build on the gains that have been made over the past year.

**Extension of Homelessness Training.** DSHS intends to expand training on homelessness issues even further to reach other groups such as community services chemical dependency treatment providers and mental health services providers.

**Housing Resources.** OCD will continue to track information on housing and services provided through the new and expanded prevention, shelter, and transitional housing programs. A special survey, planned for the Fall of 2000, will collect feedback on how the new programs have been implemented statewide. Any changes or program modifications will be initiated by July 1, 2001. Additionally, OCD will work with DSHS to explore ways in which homelessness prevention programs could be better linked with transitional housing programs to help stabilize DSHS clients.

**DSHS Research Survey to Improve State-Level Program Coordination.** DSHS conducted a substantial empirical survey of homeless families served by emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters throughout the state. Data from this study should strengthen DSHS's ability to assess the effectiveness of the new resources in stabilizing and maintaining clients in housing. It will also provide valuable insight on the impact of state-level program coordination and point to ways

*The Homeless Families Plan cannot bring about enough overall housing or higher paying jobs to truly end homelessness. But it can work to ensure that programs have a lasting impact on homeless families with children so that the cycle of homelessness can be broken.*

*Expanding Opportunities*

*Creating Stronger Linkages*

*Planning for Outcomes*

in which inter-program coordination and case management can improve services to homeless families with children.

## Chapter One ♦ Introduction

The *Homeless Families Plan* serves two functions. First, it provides a progress report on the implementation of Washington State's first *Homeless Families Plan*, roughly covering the fiscal year (FY) 1999-01 biennium. Second, it presents the second *Homeless Families Plan* for the FY 2001-03 biennium to the Governor and the Washington State Legislature, as required by RCW 43.63A.650.

The first *Homeless Families Plan* owes much of its success to the leadership of Governor Gary Locke and the 1999 Washington State Legislature. Their unanimous concurrence on a well-defined state policy to improve services for homeless families with children and the \$25.5 million they committed toward that goal have been catalysts for change. The state policy set forth in 2ESHB 1493a (*Services for Homeless Families with Children – Chapter 267, Laws of 1999*), calls for effective collaboration and coordination of service provided by the two state executive agencies, and more. It envisions an ongoing partnership of the state agencies with local communities to focus on solutions and resources at the local level.

**The mission of the *Homeless Families Plan* is to prevent and reduce homelessness of families with children by effectively coordinating and using available resources.**

Effective coordination of service not only helps to prevent and reduce homelessness, it helps prevent harm to children in homeless families. Homelessness – experienced by individual adults as well as families with children – is a pervasive social and economic problem of 21<sup>st</sup> century America. It is a consequence of many factors such as domestic violence, substance abuse, mental illness, poverty, and lack of affordable housing. The *Homeless Families Plan*, and the funds associated with it, cannot resolve all homelessness. Rather, the plan describes

*A new era of collaboration between state executive agencies and local community services providers is thriving.*

*Leadership of Governor Locke and the State Legislature*

**Mission Statement**

resources and strategies to a) improve coordination across the broad service delivery system at the state level; b) improve the linkages between state-level policy and resources and the local service delivery system; and c) strengthen public-private partnerships to build on best practices and use resources efficiently.

As this progress report is being written, implementation of the FY 1999-01 *Homeless Families Plan* continues. Although described in a one-dimensional document, the plan is truly a dynamic, evolving body of work involving literally thousands of people. More homeless families with children than ever before are getting needed help; state employees and contracted providers are better equipped with information and funds to offer help; and the communities of Washington State are enjoying a spirit of shared purpose.

*The Homeless Families Plan represents an evolving body of work done by many people.*



## Chapter Two ♦ The FY 1999-01 Homeless Families Plan: A Progress Report

This chapter describes some of the most notable activities resulting from the combined efforts of DSHS, OCD, and community providers. A common characteristic of all the activities is the shared responsibility and partnership of the people involved.

**One-Day Forums on New Resources.** Soon after the FY 1999-01 plan was completed, the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless (WSCH) asked OCD and DSHS to join them in sponsoring two one-day forums on the new resources described in the plan. The purpose of the forums was to acquaint advocates, contracted providers, and state employees with the basic requirements of the new and expanded service and explain how and where to access them. Keeping with the theme of improving coordination and collaboration, the workshops also were designed to encourage community providers and state employees from the same local areas to begin developing strategies for efficient and effective service delivery.

The forums were a resounding success. In fact, demand for the workshops was so heavy that a third session was added to accommodate the overflow.

**DSHS Staff Training.** Providing state employees with training and information is an essential strategy to assure families are able to access needed services. To help families obtain services quickly in a crisis, DSHS employees and others who work with homeless and at-risk families must be knowledgeable about available state and community resources. This knowledge helps improve the quality and effectiveness of services that are provided.

With these purposes in mind, a team of DSHS staff, in consultation with OCD staff and WSCH

*“As a shelter provider, [the forum helped me] understand the “system” that our guests are always asking about. The networking was good.”*

*“This will allow us to build a much stronger local continuum of care. Good networking opportunity.”*

*--Comments From Two Forum Participants*

*“The DSHS training on the Homeless Families’ Plan created a basis for networking and information sharing on services for homeless families in local communities. In some areas it was more effective than others. We hope that training will continue in order for DSHS staff to*

representatives, prepared a set of training materials for use in local work DSHS units across the state. The materials include general information on the causes of homelessness, the importance of stable housing as the first step to helping families be safe and self-sufficient, and the array of resources available through DSHS, OCD, and local community housing agencies.

The training materials were produced in an inventive format designed to stimulate discussion, share information, and strengthen public-private partnerships. The vision was for the training *not* to be lecture-style instruction. Instead, small groups of DSHS employees and local community providers shared information and focused on local successes and gaps in services. These workshops have helped promote positive working relationships between DSHS staff and other community representatives who work with homeless families.

The training materials are available on the DSHS Internet web page at: <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/homeless/index.html> and will continue to be available as a summary guide to the vast array of housing resources. DSHS will review and update this staff training on a periodic basis. The curriculum for future training will incorporate information about new community services that have been implemented, emerging trends and needs, data, and new research findings on homelessness. The training materials were developed to be easily adapted and incorporated into existing staff training programs and are easily accessible to other state and local agencies and the public through the DSHS website.

It is important to note that the WorkFirst case managers play an important role in helping WorkFirst families embark upon a successful job search. For homeless families, the search for stable housing is the first step to accessing services and achieving self-sufficiency. To perform their work in a way that best helps homeless families succeed, the case managers

*become an even more effective part of the community networks across the state combating homelessness.”*

*--Comment from  
WSCH Training  
Participant*

*“In Yakima, we were able to have a formerly homeless woman come to our sessions. This was seen as very positive by staff. Some of the comments I have received stated that the participation of this person helped deliver a real life perspective on the issues that homeless people and families face every day.”*

*— Comment from  
DSHS Community  
Services Division  
Training Participant*

must be able to recognize and assess factors that may be linked to a family's homelessness. They also must identify and help remove or reduce barriers to the family's self-sufficiency – such as the lack of stable housing; and inform families about appropriate community resources, including services provided by other DSHS programs and community organizations, and facilitate referrals to those services. To enhance workers' knowledge and skills, the training informed staff about:

- the department's mission to improve the quality of life for individuals and families in need, including homeless families with children, and help people achieve safe, self-sufficient, healthy, and secure lives;
- the risk factors related to homelessness, clues to recognizing these risks, and ways to sensitively help homeless families address issues that may be contributing to their homelessness or inhibiting their success in maintaining housing stability;
- the array of department and community resources available to homeless families, where the resources are located, how to access them, and what general eligibility requirements apply, etc.;
- the role of department staff in referring homeless families with children to appropriate available services within and outside the department, and assist families in making connections to those services; and
- the ongoing role of staff in identifying barriers that limit service accessibility or effectiveness and in providing ongoing suggestions to improve services in conjunction with other state and local agencies and communities.

Providing broad-based training, over a six-month period, to all front-line DSHS staff who work in local welfare offices (Community Services Offices), and Children's Administration offices was

*"I had the opportunity to sit in and observe a session of the Homeless Family Training in Bremerton on 7/19/00. I was very impressed. It was a joint session with both Bremerton CSO and DCFS attending. The Homeless Coalition members helped facilitate the training. The discussion was positive and helpful. Some good ideas were exchanged. The discussion guide worked well. The facilitator found the training guide well organized and helpful. While this was only one session, Bremerton is not unique. I think this is indicative of what is happening across the state. There is a good spirit of cooperation. I believe we are achieving our goals for the training."*

*--Comment from DSHS  
Community Services  
Division Training  
Participant*

a major undertaking for both DSHS and the Coalition members to organize. This effort involved a total of over 150 meetings to train approximately 3,000 staff. This included:

- 103 training sessions for more than 2,200 staff in the Community Service Offices (CSO); and
- 54 training sessions for approximately 623 staff in the Children's Administration's Division of Children and Family Services offices.

It should be noted that, in total numbers, there are many more DSHS staff than WSCH community service providers. There were many WSCH members who willingly volunteered their time to participate in multiple training sessions. Their interest and willingness to engage in multiple meetings with DSHS staff greatly enhanced the quality and effectiveness of the training sessions.

**Welfare to Work Housing Vouchers.** In 1999, the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), in conjunction with the federal Department of Health and Human Services, offered a new Section 8 housing voucher program for families who are current or former recipients of welfare. The "Welfare-to-Work" vouchers were awarded to states on a competitive basis. The application process required significant collaboration and coordination not only between OCD and DSHS headquarters, but, more importantly, between local public housing authorities and DSHS local CSOs. As a contingency of the awards, the program required signed working agreements between the local housing authorities and CSOs.

The collaborative planning efforts in this state have paid off. Washington received 4,165 new vouchers – more vouchers than any other state received except California. The local continuum of care planning group structure has enabled Washington State to quickly call together workgroups on special projects such as the Section 8 Voucher programs.

*"The TANF Housing Voucher process through the Spokane Housing Authority has been a blessing.*

*Though the process involves a lottery and not all clients are selected, there have been some noteworthy successes. In one case, a two-parent family with five girls under age eight—including 20 month old twins and a child with cerebral palsy—will be able to move out of their two bedroom apartment into a large house."*

*--Comment from DSHS Community Services Division staff*

HUD continues to emphasize the need to link support services with the housing it funds. The 1999 Welfare-to-Work housing vouchers were the first new housing vouchers available from the federal government since 1993, and resulted in bringing in \$22.9 million of new federal housing funds to the state.

These Section 8 Rental Certificate and Voucher programs are significant resources to help very low-income families live in decent and safe fair-market-rate housing. These vouchers make housing affordable by reducing the rent burden on families. The families pay a percentage of rent based on their earnings, with the vouchers paying the remainder of the rent. Such rental supports are crucial to assist families with low wages who are transitioning off welfare, to support families once they have exited welfare, and to move families on assistance closer to jobs.

The following is a summary of the voucher implementation from the various regions:

DSHS Region 1 (Northeast Washington) reports the Southwest Spokane CSO is fully participating in the Section 8 Voucher Program. Staff has been trained in the program requirements and referral process. In addition to making referrals for current and newly applying clients, the office has met with the Spokane Housing Authority staff to reach more eligible clients. The CSO staff contact clients participating in the DSHS Working Connection Child Care program and also clients who have left the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program within the last two years to inform them of the voucher program. This effort has resulted in well over 1,000 contacts with potentially eligible families about this program.

*Region 1 (Northeast Washington)*

Other offices that participate in the Spokane Section 8 program are North and East Spokane CSO's, and the Wenatchee CSO. Although the voucher program is currently available only in Spokane County, the SW CSO has shared the program information with the Davenport CSO.

DSHS Region 2 (Southeast Washington) has three CSOs participating in the Section 8 Housing program. All the offices find the referral process is working well and they report the vouchers are an excellent resource for their clients.

*Region 2 (Southeast Washington)*

All of the Region 3 CSOs (Northwest Washington) are participating in the Section 8 Housing Voucher Program. The Everett CSO reports about half of the slots have been filled. The program is working well and they predict that all housing slots will be filled by the end of 2000.

*Region 3 (Northwest Washington)*

All of Region 4's (King County) eleven CSOs participate in the new Section 8 Housing Voucher program. A plan was developed and instructions were sent to CSO staff on how to access the vouchers. The Seattle and King County Housing Authorities report they are pleased with the number of referrals they are receiving from the CSOs.

*Region 4 (King County)*

The Housing Authorities in Region 5 (Pierce and Kitsap Counties) did not receive any Welfare-to-Work vouchers.

Region 6 (Southwest Washington and Peninsula) has six offices that participated in the application for the Section 8 Housing Program. Some of the Housing Authorities, such as Vancouver/Clark County, received vouchers and are working with the CSOs serving their area to identify families who may be eligible.

*Region 6 (Southwest Washington and Peninsula)*

Even in areas that did not receive the Section 8 Welfare to Work voucher awards, coordination on the application process resulted in other collaborative agreements between the public housing authorities and the local CSOs. For example, as a result of working together on the Section 8 application, the Omak CSO and the Okanogan Housing Authority now work together to assist people to get into other Section 8 housing. The CSO staff act as client advocates by helping them move up on the housing waiting list, especially when domestic violence is an issue.

The CSO staff also assist clients with the housing application process. This open communication between the CSO and housing authorities will improve the housing authorities' ability to secure more certificates in the future.

**Local Continuum of Care Planning.** The objective of the Continuum of Care (CoC) planning process is for communities to develop an array of housing and supportive services to help homeless people obtain permanent housing and live with the highest level of self-sufficiency they can achieve. This requires collaborative planning at the local level, involving local policymakers, advocates, service providers, families who are or have been homeless, and other community residents. As key service providers located in every county in the state, DSHS staff in CSOs play a crucial role in the planning process.

Staff from the local CSOs are working closely with and are actively involved in their local Continuum of Care group. This includes staff from the relevant local DSHS agencies, including, but not limited to, Economic Service Administration, Children's Administration, and Health Rehabilitative Services Administration.

The participation by DSHS greatly strengthens Washington's ability to compete for federal housing funds. Participation in the local CoC process by DSHS staff is part of a strategy to continuously identify opportunities to coordinate or link services with shelter and housing provided by others. This strong partnership in Washington state has enabled local communities to remain competitive in HUD's funding process and has resulted in numerous awards of homeless funding over the past years.

As an adjunct of the planning process, DSHS staff will continue to work to establish new or strengthen current partnerships with a variety of local agencies or service providers. This effort will facilitate a broad understanding of the full spectrum of community resources and needs;

### *List of DSHS Regional Homeless Representatives*

#### *Region 1:*

*Dennis Faulks  
(509) 533-2418  
Becky Jasper  
(509) 533-2677*

#### *Region 2:*

*Dawn Sullivan  
(509) 225-7931*

*Mike Hart  
(509) 225-7915  
(backup)*

#### *Region 3:*

*Candy Banker  
(360) 658-6874*

#### *Region 4:*

*Chet Linowski  
(206) 272-2114*

#### *Region 5:*

*Jessie Jordan-Parker  
(253) 597-4559*

#### *Region 6:*

*Kindra Benavidez  
(360) 586-2668*

promote positive and informal communications among and between community service providers, advocates, families, and others; and create a sense of shared responsibility among all involved.

**Statewide Rural Continuum of Care Planning.**

As the state's housing assistance agency, OCD leads a consortium of rural counties to plan for a comprehensive system of homeless services in areas where there are fewer resources, limited capacity for planning, and a high need for expanded services for people who are homeless. With the assistance of DSHS and Veterans' Affairs, OCD formed a steering committee to oversee the development of a Rural Homeless Plan. The goal of the plan is to build a housing and service delivery system to assist people to exit homelessness as quickly as possible through a housing first approach that also includes linking people to services as needed.

In many rural areas, the only shelter may be specialized safe homes for survivors of domestic violence or a few days stay in a local motel. Services, especially case management, are limited or only provided in one town miles from where homeless families are located. The Rural Homeless Plan is beginning to address these gaps by maximizing the amount of state and federal assistance for rural areas so that an adequate base of housing options and solid case management services can be assured.

Since 1997, HUD has awarded 17 grants for \$5.1 million for rural homeless programs across Washington. This year, OCD applied for another HUD homeless grant totaling \$3 million. HUD will announce their decisions by December 2000.

**Washington State Coalition for the Homeless Annual Conference.** Annually, with contributions from OCD, foundations, banks, and other institutions, the WSCH holds a conference on the latest programs and best practices in serving people who are homeless. These conferences are

*Rural Steering  
Committee Formed*

*Case management is  
an important need.*

*Washington state  
receives additional  
HUD resources for  
rural communities.*

*Annual training is  
another big success.*



a major source of training and education intended to increase the quality and effectiveness of homeless programs. People who are currently homeless or who had been homeless, are also active participants. The conference in May 2000 was a banner year for the number of DSHS staff who attended and benefited from the connections and increased awareness gained as a result of this event. The conference set a new tone of collaboration and information sharing, serving as an excellent forum to highlight best practices among participants.

**DSHS' Survey of Homeless Families.** The DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division recently conducted a substantial empirical survey of homeless families served by emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters throughout the state. The study will provide state policy-makers, OCD, and DSHS agency executives reliable data on the numbers of families homeless throughout the state, their circumstances and histories, and in particular, the extent to which the families do or do not get DSHS welfare benefits and social services.

*DSHS study will provide more information on homeless families.*

DSHS and OCD will use the study results to assist in "fine-tuning" this plan in order to improve community and state services for homeless families. The first reports will be available early in 2001.

**Management of the Additional Requirements Emergent Needs Program (AREN).** The DSHS program called AREN has evolved through a series of collaborative efforts both in the development of the expanded program policy and in re-focusing the program to keep it within budget.

*AREN: an example of collaborative efforts.*

As a part of the first homeless plan, the AREN program was expanded to serve homeless families and better serve the needs of families at-risk of becoming homeless. The program was changed to allow AREN to be used to pay the amount needed for deposits and first and last month's rent to enable homeless families to

secure housing. This also allowed the program to serve the needs of survivors of domestic violence to secure new housing. The expanded AREN program has been an effective tool to help homeless families secure housing and to keep others from becoming homeless or having their utilities shut off.

However, the need for affordable housing greatly exceeds the funds available under AREN. Under the 1999-01 plan, additional TANF funds were allocated to AREN. Within a few months of the program policy changes, it became evident that the current rate of AREN expenditures, if continued over the biennium, would result in the biennial allocation level being exceeded. DSHS staff worked closely with WSCH representatives and OCD staff to revise policies and assure that AREN resources would continue to be available to help the families most in need. Effective August 1, 2000, certain program restrictions were instituted.

In discussions with DSHS staff, WSCH representatives report they are seeing AREN have a positive impact in reducing homelessness among TANF families. Case managers have also recognized that AREN is a significant resource available to help families secure housing and to prevent homelessness. The WSCH expressed their thanks for the hard work of staff in the local offices and for the increased collaboration and coordination between the CSOs and the community housing providers. Likewise, DSHS staff have appreciated the support and assistance from many community providers.

**Increased Collaboration Between State and Community Agency Staff:** The staff training sessions have resulted in increased partnership between community homeless service providers and Children's Administration staff in the six regions of the state. The local Division of Children and Family Service office have invited both local DSHS CSO staff and community services providers to the homeless training sessions they have held. The local WSCH contact

*DSHS staff, Coalition representatives and OCD staff worked together to amend policy and to protect resources for families most in need.*

*Using AREN, staff from the Spokane CSO assisted a homeless mother of five children to secure housing. As a result, she was able to keep her children and begin to look for work.*

*In Region 4, King County, a Homelessness Task Force with representatives from every CSO and the Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless meet monthly. In addition,*

persons have been instrumental in coordinating the sessions and encouraging other community providers to attend the sessions.

Children's Administration Regional Administrators provided the springboard for training in the regional and local Division of Children and Family Service offices. The Regional Administrators brought the message of collaborative community-based training home to each of the six state regions. The homelessness training sessions have provided a stimulating experience for Children's Administration staff. The training has encouraged staff to look to community-based resources as additional assets available to help provide optimal assistance to the families and children served.

The homeless training has also given Division of Children and Family Service social workers a better understanding of the warning signs of potential homelessness some families may exhibit. The training provided staff with better information on the kinds of needs many families have who are re-entering stable housing after spending time in shelters or living on the streets. As a result of the training, social workers have a new appreciation for and greater sensitivity to the issues of homelessness many families face on a daily basis.

**Washington State Consolidated Plan.** HUD requires OCD to write a consolidated plan that addresses the housing and community development needs of our state every five years. This plan also serves as the state's application for Community Development Block Grant, HOME, Emergency Shelter Grants Program, and Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS funding. This funding enables the state to address the overall need for permanent affordable housing, for special needs housing, and housing for people who are homeless. Annually, Washington State receives approximately \$26.9 million to address housing and community development needs of our state.

*every CSO has identified a liaison as the point person for any issues relating to homelessness. Region 4 also maintains a Homeless web site where meeting notes and resources can be located.*

*Promoting a new awareness and greater understanding of homelessness issues*

*Planning to effectively manage more than \$26 million of HUD Grants that flow into the state annually.*

To create an effective system of distributing these valuable resources, OCD relies on the advice and support of other state agencies who, along with OCD, are engaged in helping to build successful communities. DSHS is one of OCD's key partners and they have been an active participant in this year's process. The partnership between OCD and DSHS greatly facilitated work on developing Washington State's Consolidated Plan. Feedback from DSHS staff on statewide needs helped OCD to identify priorities and to develop strategies to fill gaps in services. This involvement also increased awareness of the planning efforts of both DSHS and OCD and encouraged dialog and planning on how agency plans could be better coordinated and linked together.

### **Implementation of New and Expanded Homelessness Resources**

**Homelessness Prevention Services.** Families with very low incomes typically have few financial resources to draw upon in emergencies. A sudden family illness, a layoff from work, or another misfortune, may trigger a low-income family's rapid decline into homelessness. Once homeless, the longer a family remains homeless, the more difficult and costly it becomes for the family to regain stability and secure permanent housing. In the case of family homelessness, the adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" rings true. Both OCD and DSHS have implemented expanded resources designed to prevent homelessness among families with children, and help already homeless families quickly regain housing stability.

**Increased Prevention Funding to OCD.** \$2.5 million per biennium of DSHS' Consolidated Emergency Assistance Program (CEAP) funds was transferred to OCD for distribution to emergency shelter providers. This funding was used to offer a new initiative called the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP), which provides up to 90 days of homelessness

*Closing the front door to homelessness.*

*Providing up to 90 days of assistance to prevent homelessness.*

prevention services to families with children. Services include short-term assistance to pay for rent arrearages or first month's rent and deposits. This new program prioritizes families who are at-risk of becoming homeless and not eligible to receive TANF.

OCD relied on the existing network of shelter providers and programs to deliver these new resources. Contracts were awarded July 1, 1999, however, several months were taken up in training program staff on the rules of the EHAP program and in working out the referral protocols between DSHS and local shelter staff. While this meant the program took longer to get started, it also meant DSHS staff and shelter staff were talking and conferring more often which, in the long run, was helping to create a solid working partnership.

*Opening a dialog to coordinate services.*

**Additional DSHS Prevention Services.** An additional \$6 million per biennium of federal TANF funds was made available for the AREN program to improve services to families at risk of becoming homeless and to families who are already homeless. As discussed earlier in this report, an additional \$14 million was later added due to the high level of needs encountered in local communities. The expanded funds were especially crucial in urban areas with higher housing prices: Spokane, Everett, Vancouver, Seattle, and King County.

*Additional funds for AREN program.*

Prior to the FY 1999-01 biennium and the increased funds allocated to AREN, financial assistance to families at risk of becoming homeless was available, but severely restricted. The maximum amount available to an individual family in need was often not sufficient to prevent evictions or it was too limited to successfully move families into housing. Families who were already homeless when seeking assistance were excluded from AREN assistance.

The increased AREN allocation allowed DSHS to modify its policy to serve families currently

enrolled in or eligible for the WorkFirst, State Family Assistance, or Refugee Cash Assistance Programs with sufficient emergency assistance to avoid homelessness or to significantly shorten the time families are homeless. These benefits are used to pay for expenses such as rent, security deposits, mortgage payments, and necessary fees.

AREN has proven to be a significant benefit to many families who are caught in circumstances involving domestic violence. The new AREN policies give DSHS case managers the resources needed to help these families move quickly into new housing out of harm's way.

The FY 1999-01 plan also increased the Diversion Cash Assistance (DCA) program allocation by \$4 million in federal TANF funds for the biennium. DCA is another resource available to families to help with housing and other emergency expenses. This program allows TANF-eligible families with short-term emergency needs to receive one-time emergency assistance payments in lieu of enrolling in WorkFirst. DCA is designed to keep families stable, functioning, and self-sufficient without ongoing financial assistance. Many families seeking help from DCA have emergent housing needs.

Since the program began in 1997, about 70 percent of the program expenditures have helped families with emergent housing needs. DSHS anticipated the continued demand for this type of assistance and made additional TANF federal funds available for this purpose.

### **Housing Resources**

OCD received significant new resources to increase shelter capacity and provide transitional housing for homeless families with children to help close the gap between homelessness and permanent affordable housing.

*The expanded policy prevents many families from becoming homeless. For others it decreases the time they are homeless.*

*Increased funds for Diversion Cash Assistance program.*

*Many families use DCA for emergency housing needs.*

*"You've got a real spectrum of people," said Jon Martin, housing program director at Blue Mountain Action*

**New ESAP Funds.** The Emergency Shelter Assistance Program (ESAP) administered by OCD was increased by \$2.5 million per biennium, with the new funding dedicated to families with children. ESAP is the state's primary network of temporary housing and services with funding allocated to all 39 counties in the state. Funding is provided to 34 lead agencies that in turn pass funds through to 160 programs across the state.

Some counties have a mix of shelter facilities, safe homes for survivors of domestic violence, and voucher programs that provide a few days shelter in a local motel. Others may be limited to a couple of safe homes or a voucher program. The additional funding enabled shelter providers to increase shelter and homelessness prevention services. Homeless providers used 18 percent of the funds to prevent families from becoming homeless, and the remaining to shelter families and to provide a limited amount of case management services. Shelter providers were able to increase housing by leasing apartments to serve as temporary shelter for homeless families.

**Transitional Housing.** OCD designed and implemented the Transitional Housing Operating and Rent program (THOR) to provide rental assistance for homeless families in transitional housing programs, and to provide operating subsidies for existing transitional housing facilities. OCD provides formula allocations of THOR funding to 32 counties that for the biennium totaled \$4,292,501. The program is administered by 24 lead agencies that have developed a Continuum of Care Plan. Local providers use their allocations for any combination of rental assistance and operating subsidy, in accordance with their local Continuum of Care goals.

Most homeless families are unable to afford permanent housing by the time they have to leave emergency shelters. Waiting lists for traditional subsidized housing are years long, and do not often provide the kind of services that homeless families need to achieve self-sufficiency and

*Council. "The goal is to reach the highest level of independence. That could be to go back to school or get into a job. For someone else, it may be how to successfully live on Social Security in subsidized housing."*

*--The Union Bulletin*

*In White Salmon, we have Guided Path, which has a homeless shelter and transitional housing. They have a self-sufficiency plan that works with us [DSHS] in helping families get permanent housing and employment. They have storerooms of furniture, clothing, dishes, and bedding to help families set up house, once they find a place. They also have six transitional houses for families to move into, to help them get on their feet. The*

permanent housing. The THOR program helps to fill the gap between homeless shelters and permanent housing with up to two years of housing assistance and intensive case management. Local programs are designed so that the family's subsidy decreases as their income increases, until they can make it on their own. Families that "graduate" from the THOR program are self-sufficient and permanently housed or well on their way to meeting those goals.

**Capital Funding for Housing Projects.** OCD received a total of \$5 million to build and/or preserve emergency and transitional housing for homeless families with children. Another \$1 million was appropriated specifically for survivors of domestic violence. Seven projects for homeless families were awarded funds to create 46 units of transitional housing in Seattle, Tacoma, Vancouver, Spokane, Newport, and Lacey. Two projects serving survivors of domestic violence will provide 40 beds in Spokane and another 8 in Chehalis.

### **Changes in Data Collection and Reporting.**

In order to find the most effective ways to link housing and services to help prevent homelessness or to shorten the length of homelessness, it is important to collect and analyze up-to-date and accurate data. The FY 1999-01 Plan identified the need for improved data on homelessness, and the limitations of our current state-level systems.

Several modifications have been implemented or are planned to be implemented in OCD and DSHS data collection systems. The following is an overview of the latest efforts.

**OCD's Redesigned Data Reporting Form.** OCD staff worked with a group of ESAP contractors to redesign the program reporting form. The form was reduced from six pages to two, and new

*White Salmon CSO had one family that lost their housing. With the assistance of Guided Path, they were able to get housing and today the family is working and off public assistance.*

*-- Comments from White Salmon CSO staff.*

*Because people move from place to place and because some are homeless today but not next week, next month, or next year, there will always be homeless people that no counting system, no matter how sophisticated or well conceived, will ever capture in its count or track with accuracy.*

*--Plan for a Data Collection System on People who are Homeless, November 1999*



instructions were developed. Although this simplified form does collect less detailed data, the consensus was the minor loss of collected data outweighed the increased quality of data resulting from an easier to fill-out form.

In addition to simplifying the report form, ESAP contractors were given the opportunity to submit their reports electronically, via a web-based reporting system. The system eliminates duplicate data entry (by the subcontractors, lead agencies, and OCD), and eliminates the submission of reports containing math errors (which required follow-up and correction by lead agencies and OCD). The system also allows contractors to add their own questions to the electronic form, so that the system can be used to collect data that local communities are interested in tracking.

**Changes in the DSHS Data Collection.** The “living arrangement” data captured for eligibility determination, if shown to be reliable, could provide a management tool for monitoring the prevalence and character of family homelessness throughout the state, and for evaluating the effectiveness of community initiatives to prevent or undo that homelessness. To improve the reliability of those “living arrangement” data, DSHS, per the FY 1999-01 plan, has improved both data capture procedures and staff training on these procedures.

The research study of homeless families can evaluate the extent to which the “living arrangement” data are adequate for monitoring family homelessness. For the many families who allow access to their welfare records, the study can compare the homelessness histories provided by the families with their “living arrangement” codes and dates.

As part of the FY 1999-01 plan, it became apparent that changes to the DSHS data collection system were needed to enhance DSHS’ ability to gather and analyze data on services to homeless

*While we know where we want to be in the next five years, we can’t get there without knowing where we have been during the last five years.*

*—Comment from Alan Painter, State Advisory Council on Homelessness*

*Improved data collection for better planning.*

families. While the data was relatively reliable in indicating when a client became homeless, the codes are not reliably changed or modified when that period of homelessness ends. For this reason, changes were made to improve DSHS' ability to track the number of months a family is homeless. It was also necessary to require changes to be sure the data reflected the current housing status as a result of the new resources dedicated under the *Homeless Families Plan*. Finally, the improved data should strengthen DSHS' ability to assess the effectiveness of the new resources in stabilizing and maintaining clients in housing.

This limited housing data is collected on individuals who use DSHS income, medical, and food assistance services. The "living arrangement" code identifies the type of housing the family occupies. These codes include:

- "HO" - homeless without housing - for clients living on the streets or in a car,
- "EH" - emergency housing - for clients in a homeless shelter,
- "HH" - homeless with housing - for clients living temporarily with someone else such as on a friend or relative's couch or illegally doubled-up.
- "AH" – at home - for clients residing in his or her own home.

DSHS has modified the living arrangement so the codes must be updated whenever the client's address is changed. This should facilitate the analysis of data relevant to homelessness of families with children.

Information gathered through the living arrangement codes will be periodically analyzed and shared with OCD and other interested parties. Once OCD data is improved, it should be possible to reliably assess the effects of increased

*Specialized coding indicates families specific housing situation.*

*Measuring effects of increased coordination.*

coordination between the two agencies upon the lives of homeless families, by cross-checking data on individuals or families in both OCD's and DSHS' databases. This kind of data coordination will help in assessing the extent of homelessness among families using DSHS' economic and medical services, and families who seek shelter. It will also be another tool to help link housing and social services in preventing or relieving homelessness.

**DSHS' Survey of Homeless Families Being Helped by Emergency Shelters and Domestic Violence Shelters.** As mentioned earlier, DSHS conducted a substantial empirical survey of homeless families served by emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters throughout the state. The main topics covered by the survey are:

- Numbers of families using the two types of shelters statewide, characteristics of those families and the family members;
- Prior family homelessness and frequencies of three characteristic different homelessness patterns: once-only, episodic (on-and-off), and chronic (homeless more or less continuously);
- Past year's living arrangements, in particular use of own place, shared housing, and places not suitable as housing (cars, campers, garages, public buildings...);
- Current and past access to welfare benefits and to additional welfare funds for housing emergencies. Quality of service received at welfare offices, reported difficulties in getting welfare;
- Families' sources of money, parents' employment and participation in WorkFirst;
- What families are doing to get permanent housing, and their problems in getting permanent housing;

*The DSHS survey will capture a picture of homeless families.*

- Need for and use of DSHS-funded social services: mental health care, alcohol/drug abuse treatment, child welfare services; prevalence of domestic violence;
- Need for and access to health care and dental care;
- Children's school attendance, use of pre-schools, child care;
- Adequacy of food while at the shelter;
- Urban-rural and East-West regional differences in the above data;
- Usefulness of the "homeless" codes in the DSHS Automated Client Eligibility System (ACES) for monitoring prevalence of homelessness among welfare families.

In conducting the survey, DSHS used the following research methods:

Scope. The project attempts to interview every family who was using one of the shelters in the sample during a single night. This definition includes families using shelter-provided motel vouchers, as well as families at shelter housing. The statistical sample of shelters is representative of nearly all emergency shelters and domestic violence shelters in Washington state, including some privately funded shelters.

Fieldwork. Shelter providers are contacted by phone and asked to invite all families who used their shelter the previous night to in-person interviews at the shelter site. Project staff do the interviews in Spanish or English. For families who speak only other languages, we attempt to get professional interpreters. Families are paid for their time.

We blend in administrative data. Most families give the project permission to add in data from their DSHS' welfare records and records of DSHS-

funded mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and child welfare services. (Four out of 5 families gave permission to access their DSHS records.) DSHS welfare records will provide extensive reliable data on those families' access to welfare benefits before and after becoming homeless. All identified data are kept securely confidential and never released even within DSHS.

Interviews with administrators. To add information about DSHS and local programs for homeless families, we interview the shelter managers or key staff at most of the sampled shelters, and the welfare office administrators in a sample of studied communities.